



# CUBA INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## **CENTERING CULTURE IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL JOURNEY RESOURCE GUIDE**



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# Introduction

Every classroom and workplace is filled with people who carry powerful stories, languages, and traditions from their families and communities. For many Native American, Latiné, Filipino, Indian, Black, and transnational youth, these cultural strengths are central to who they are. Yet, too often, schools and workplaces overlook these assets or send the message that people must set them aside in order to succeed. *Centering Culture in Your Professional Journey* was created to challenge that message. It affirms that culture, language, and tradition are not obstacles but powerful sources of strength. This guide was created with CISD students for CISD students. It offers suggestions for how to take pride in your cultural wealth, build confidence in who you are, and connect your lived experiences to your future academic and career pathways.

Just as important, this guide encourages schools to act as true partners with families and communities. When educators create space for students to share their stories and honor their cultural knowledge, they send the message that identity is not separate from learning or success, it is central to it. Through reflection activities, storytelling, and practical tools, this resource helps build stronger bridges between school, home, and community with our high school youth at the center.

Most importantly, this guide is an invitation: for students to build on the the cultural capital they already carry, and for schools to work alongside families in preparing young people to thrive in every setting. When culture is embraced as an asset, students are able to move forward with pride, resilience, and purpose.



# How to use this guide:

This resource is designed to be flexible and interactive. Each section includes links that highlight the strengths students bring with them. Educators can use it:

- **In the classroom**, to engage in activities or spark conversations that help students connect identity with learning.
- **In advising or mentoring**, to support students as they plan for college, careers, or other postsecondary pathways.
- **In partnership with families**, to affirm that schools value and build on the cultural knowledge already present in students' lives.



Students can use this guide to:

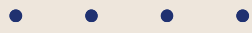
- **Affirm Cultural Identity:** Understand and take pride in your cultural backgrounds.
- **View Culture as Capital:** Learn to use language, tradition, and heritage as professional assets.
- **Know Your Rights:** Learn about bias and discrimination and your rights in the workplace.
- **Develop Professional Skills:** Guidance for finding a job or internship, creating a resume and cover letter and preparing for a job in a way that builds on your cultural wealth.

Whether you use the guide as a whole or draw from individual sections, the goal remains the same: to affirm culture as a source of power and to prepare young people to thrive wherever their journeys take them.

**NOTE:** Throughout this guide, arrows indicate clickable links to videos and resources, and each small circle is also clickable.



# Note to Teachers & Administrators



*Ya'at'eeh, Hola, Namaskaram, Kumusta, Hi/Hello!*

This guide was designed not only for students, but with students. During CISD's Summer 2025 Research Institute, a group of diverse high school students helped shape the very sections you see here. They shared their insights, reflected on their experiences, and gave feedback on what topics felt most important for their success. Their voices guided the structure and focus of this resource, ensuring that it speaks to the real challenges and strengths young people carry into schools and workplaces.



As teachers, counselors, and mentors, you play a vital role in how students see their own cultural knowledge reflected in learning spaces. This guide is meant to support you in creating environments where students feel seen, valued, and empowered to bring their whole selves into their academic and career journeys. Use the activities to spark conversation, the stories to build connection, and the strategies to partner with families and communities in affirming culture as a strength.

Most importantly, approach this resource as a living conversation. The students who shaped it remind us that identity and culture are always growing, and so too are the ways schools can support them.

*Ahehee', Salamát, Gracias, Dhanyavaadalu, Thank you!*





# Section 1: Who Am I? Building a Strong Self-Identity



Before stepping into any workplace or professional setting, it's important to understand and celebrate who you are. This section invites you to reflect on your personal history, values, language, and traditions/elements that shape your identity and make you unique. Through journaling, storytelling, and cultural exploration, you'll begin to see that your background is not something to set aside, but a powerful source of strength and perspective. Knowing yourself is the first step to advocating for yourself and thriving in any space you enter.

As you move through this document, click on the images for links and resources.

## Key Topics:



- Exploring your personal history, language, and traditions as sources of strength
- Understanding identity as the values, family, and experiences that shape who you are
- Building confidence and self-advocacy through cultural pride
- Honoring family and ancestral teachings that guide your journey

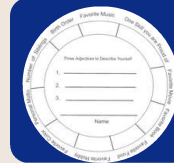
When we understand ourselves, we can better understand others. For many students, self-identity begins with family teachings: the way your grandparents greet visitors, the recipes passed down at holidays, the songs sung during long drives, or the laughter that fills your kitchen. These are not small details; they are evidence of cultural continuity. Recognizing them helps you move through new environments like college, jobs, or leadership roles, without losing what matters most.

## What is identity?

Identity is the combination of everything that makes you who you are. It is your values, interests, languages, family, community, and the experiences that have shaped you. It includes how you see yourself and how the world sometimes sees you. As you step into the workplace or college, understanding your identity helps you make choices that align with who you are. It reminds you that your culture, voice, and background are strengths, not things to hide or change to fit in. Knowing who you are gives you the confidence to speak up, work with others respectfully, and stay grounded even when you're in unfamiliar spaces. Knowing yourself lays a foundation for making decisions and choosing pathways. It helps you make choices aligned with your beliefs and respond to bias or misunderstanding without shrinking who you are. Identity work also keeps your ancestors' lessons alive while preparing you to mentor those who follow.

## Here are some ways you can use the links below:

**Personal Identity Wheel Lesson:** Explore all the parts of who you are and reflect on which ones you share or keep private.



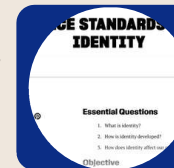
**Toolkit for “Invisible Identity”:** Learn how to recognize parts of identity that others may overlook or misunderstand, and why visibility matters.

**The Mask You Live In:** Watch a short film that explores how gender stereotypes can limit who you are and how you express ourselves.



**Translanguaging – Language Identity:** This may seem more appropriate for teachers to implement; however, as a student, think about how using all your languages freely (English, Spanish, Diné bizaad, etc.) is a sign of strength and intelligence.

**Unpacking Identity - Social Justice Standards:** Reflect on identity, fairness, and respect. How can we create spaces where everyone belongs?



**Identity Activities and Lesson Plans – IndigNM:** Explore Indigenous youth stories and projects from across New Mexico that celebrate culture and identity.

**When you know your story, you walk into every room with purpose. Your identity is a compass that grounds you in who you are and points you toward who you are becoming.**

### Research Articles:

García, O., & Kley, T.(2022). Translanguaging and transformative teaching for emergent bilingual students: Building instructional spaces. This work emphasizes leveraging linguistic identity in education and beyond.

Love, B. L. (2019). We Want to Do More Than Survive: Abolitionist Teaching and the Pursuit of Educational Freedom. Love argues for culturally grounded identity work as resistance and self-empowerment for youth.